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THE KATANGA

The Katanga is the southernmost of the 6 provinces of the Congo, covering an area of 190,000 square miles, in which live an estimated 1,630,000 Congolese and 30,000 Europeans. Adjacent to it on the south is the rich Copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia.

The wealth of the Congo is derived from its mineral exports which constitute 60 percent of all exports and 20 percent of the gross national product. Nearly all of this mineral production comes from Katanga and the two neighboring provinces, Kivu and Kasai. All of the copper, cobalt, manganese, zinc, cadmium, germanium, and uranium -- some two-thirds of the total value of the Congo's mineral production -- comes from Katanga. This one province produces 7 percent of the world's copper and 60 percent of its cobalt.

In contrast, agricultural resources of the Katanga are poor. Unproductive soils and a six-month dry season are limiting factors, but the Katanga is a food-deficit area primarily because the development of its mineral wealth has brought about increasing urbanization of the population. More than a third of the inhabitants now live in urban centers. The rural African who once supplied his own limited needs has moved to the city and at the same time has increased his food consumption.

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The products of Katanga reach salt water ports by three routes, each more than 1,000 miles long. Only because of preferential rates has the 1,700-mile rail-river-rail route through the Congo via Leopoldville and Matadi carried 28 percent of the tonnage. The all-rail route through Portuguese Angola to Lobito carries 56 percent of the tonnage because it is shorter and requires no transshipment. A third route, by rail, which crosses the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland to Beira, Mozambique, carries 13 percent.

The future wellbeing of the Congo on anything resembling pre-independence levels depends on the income derived from Katanga minerals. The flight of capital and other difficulties of the pre-independence period had put the Congo in dire financial straits even before the current disorders. Now, the possibility of five provinces of the Congo becoming solvent without the wealth of the Katanga or massive foreign aid is very slight. Even though an independent Katanga itself would face difficulties because of its isolation and distance from markets, the hostility of other Congo provinces, and possible encroachment from Rhodesia, the economic picture for this one province looks bright. The adherence of Kivu and Kasai to a seceding Katanga perhaps would mitigate the Katanga food shortage, but it would leave the rest of the Congo with gold as its only mineral export.

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